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U. S. Department of Agriculture

BE SURE ABOUT SEED POTATOES

A radio talk by Dr. William Stuart, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered through Station WRC and 32 other stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, Thursday, November 7, 1929 at 1:10 p.m. Eastern Standard Time.

The present trend of effort in all agricultural activities is in the direction of lowered production costs. This is particularly true with respect to the potato in which the range in cost of production may vary from 30 cents to \$1.50 or more per bushel. It is evident that with such a wide variation in cost the grower whose production costs are from 30 to 40 cents per bushel enjoys a distinct advantage over those exceeding that amount, unless they are favored by proximity to a good market and are able to make their own deliveries.

Of the many factors entering into the production of large acre yields none are more important than that of the use of high grade seed potatoes. But you ask, what are high grade seed potatoes and how and where can I buy them? Those of you who live in the northern tier of States are perhaps not so much concerned with these questions as those in the South or in other regions where the production of high quality seed is a more difficult accomplishment and perhaps one inadvisable to undertake.

Good seed potatoes may be characterized as seed stock produced by healthy and properly grown plants. In other words, that are free or almost free from diseases causing a reduction in yield. Perhaps you ask, how am I to recognize such seed and where can I buy it? At the present time the only way you can be reasonably certain of getting such seed is to buy certified seed. What do I mean by certified seed is probably your next query? Bona fide certified seed potatoes should have a tag attached to the container affirming that the plants producing the seed were inspected during the growing season by a competent inspector for the purpose of determining their freedom from disease such as mosaic, leafroll, spindle tuber, etc., which cannot be recognized in the tubers by any method of inspection thus far devised. Most seed certification agencies require two field inspections followed by a bin inspection of the tubers before the seed stock is eligible for certification. The official tag should state that the contents of the container has met the requirements set up for certification. This in brief explains the character of certified seed but does not tell you how to get in touch with growers of certified seed. Usually the easiest way to do this, if you do not know the name and address of the seed certification agent or agency, is to address your inquiry to the Director of the State Agricultural Experiment Station of the State from which you desire to procure your seed. As a rule such inquiries receive prompt attention. The seed certification inspector can furnish you with a list of growers who have certified seed of the variety desired. He can also advise as to probable cost of seed. Should it so happen that all available certified seed has been disposed of it is quite possible that you can be furnished with a select list of growers whose fields failed to pass inspection on account of being too weedy, or a poor stand, or through neglect in properly controlling insect pests, which were sufficiently

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free from disease to have passed the certification requirements. Such seed stock is a safer purchase than that of unknown origin even though handled by a reputable seed firm.

No time should be lost in the purchase of seed provided you are dependent on outside sources for your seed supply. The natural vigor of the seed stock is best conserved when it is held under good storage conditions. A temperature of 37° to 38° F. is probably the ideal temperature at which to hold seed stock after it has passed through its natural rest period, say about February 1. Prior to that date a temperature of 40° to 42° is probably just as satisfactory.

Proper air humidity in the storage house is also important. It is generally recognized that an 85 to 90 per cent air saturation reduces water losses through transpiration to a minimum. The best container in which to keep seed potatoes is the wooden collapsible bushel crate, or any rigid ventilated container. If the storage requirements outlined above are approximately observed and good seed stock has been originally placed in storage it should produce an excellent crop under good growing and cultural conditions.